



Rupert Rossetti: My name is Rupert Rossetti. I was born on August the 14th, 1951 in a little village outside Epsom called Ashtead, outside Epsom in Southern England. Now I live in just halfway between Port Deposit and Rising Sun in Cecil County, Maryland, and I'm retired and an overactive volunteer.

Rupert Rossetti: I suppose the place I ought to start is that I came into this very late. I became environmentally aware shortly before I retired. I'm a geologist by profession. My training was in field mapping. I was expecting when I finished college to do hard rock geology, doing prospecting in places around the world. The job I had lined up fell through, and I ended up in the student union drowning my sorrows. One of my classmates said, "Well, why don't you come see my boss?" Four days later, I was on a rig in the North Sea working for a service company for an oil company, and I never looked back.

Rupert Rossetti: Eventually, I joined the oil company and worked as a geologist and a drilling engineer for the oil company for about 20 years. Then in the last 10 years, I transferred from the oil company, which was Conoco, to DuPont, and became a business process consultant. I like making maps, and I can make maps of geology or I can make maps of business processes. I worked as a... gone above my level of competence and became a middle manager in Conoco. That was obviously above my level of competence, and ended up transferring in as an independent contributor in DuPont. I had a wonderful 10 years in DuPont, understanding business processes on the chemical company side, which was something I knew absolutely nothing about.

Rupert Rossetti: I really didn't think very much about the environment at all until my wife actually became a member of the local Cecil County Planning Commission. That exposed us to... opened our eyes, I suppose, to a whole lot of things about land use. I ended up joining a group that had been started by the Sierra Club in Cecil County that was going through a huge growth spurt. Through that group, called the Partnership for Cecil County, I became a... I was a trained facilitator at Conoco. I was a trained facilitator at DuPont. I became a facilitator for all the meetings we had.

Rupert Rossetti: We had a group of land use forums in 2002, I think it was, in Cecil County, and one of our speakers was a lady named Susan [Phelps Larcher 00:03:29], who was the coordinator of the Upper Western Shore Tributary Team at the time. She recruited me onto the tributary strategy teams. I was dormant on the tributary strategy team for the next two years. The way she recruited us, she invited my wife and I to go for a sail on the governor's yacht when we still had a governor's yacht. When I was on the yacht, she made the pitch that one of us should become a trib team member, and I said yes. I couldn't hardly refuse.



Rupert Rossetti: So, I was very, very busy with a project at DuPont at the time. We were putting in a worldwide information system, and I was traveling more than not. They had a reduction in force in October... or in 2004. I put my hand up. I had 30 years in under the combined companies and got a severance package and retired really early. It was exactly the time that the tributary strategy was being redeveloped. I think it was 2004 time. They were rewriting the tributary strategy.

Rupert Rossetti: I got involved, knowing none of the vernacular, in some of the draft reviews of the strategy that was being put together. That really was my first exposure to the environmental side of life. I was a land use activist and ended up being on the Upper Western Shore Tributary Team sort of as an early retiree and somebody who knew how to facilitate things. It was a natural, really a natural fit. I suppose I still am a member of the Upper Western Shore Tributary Team, but we only do one thing a year, which is the two wade-ins. One is Anita Leight Estuary Center in Hartford County and one at the Cecil wade-in that we do every year. That's how I got started in the environmental side.

Eve Austin: Well, I have two questions. One, I'm wondering why did it fold, but I'm also wondering what that was like to be... They seem very opposite to me. You've got this giant chemical company, and then you've got the land that's being negatively affected by the chemicals, and what was that like?

Rupert Rossetti: Ah, that's a very good question. I suppose you could say the same about the oil company.

Eve Austin: Yes.

Rupert Rossetti: The oil companies tend to have a bad reputation. One of my jobs on the geo-science side, there's an awful lot of us on the geo-science side that are interested in the environment. I don't think there's sort of a very clear-cut definition. One of my jobs in the oil company when I was in the drilling department was actually using whatever techniques we could do to help us avoid blowouts on exploratory wells, which would be exploratory wells anywhere in the world. It was a great way to see the world, places that you wouldn't otherwise normally see, but sitting on a drilling rig when you're doing the drilling and trying to either predict before we drill or detect during drilling, to stop us or to help us avoid any environmental issues was, I suppose, one way of contributing.

Rupert Rossetti: On the chemical side, I know they tend to have a bad rap, but an awful lot of the things we did was to try and avoid waste. One thing that I will say about DuPont is their safety... I have never been anywhere with such a safety culture. Things I would not even think about twice in Conoco were... you couldn't do them in



DuPont. It got drilled in in 10 years. Even though I was a retread, it got drilled into me.

Rupert Rossetti: As a kid, as a family, we had always gone out walking every Sunday. After church, we'd go out and we'd hike on good weather days on one of the dams around Epsom. We did that as a family, and I suppose loved wide open spaces and got my first geology course at the age of 14 by a schoolteacher named David Mitchell, who I was in a small parochial Catholic school with 400 students from the ages of five to 18 and 18 teachers, most of them secular priests.

Rupert Rossetti: This young man came in with a completely different way of educating people, and he took us out on field trips. You'd just get this exhilarating rush of being on top of a hill and looking at the layout of the land below you. He taught us how to see what the landscape was all about. That's why I wanted to go into hard rock geology, where I'd be working on the terrain. Well, when the terrain's 500 feet below you in the North Sea, there's not much of it to look at. I suppose I still kept that in me. My wife is also a petroleum geologist. We both had the same kind of background and passions, so that's how I ended up doing that.

Eve Austin: This really early formative experiences out in nature and the environment, they have a lifelong impact.

Rupert Rossetti: Huge. Huge. Absolutely huge and still going strong.

Eve Austin: Yes. Because right now just to jump ahead and then we can come back, right now you've chosen to live... You live on a farm, correct?

Rupert Rossetti: Yep. Live on a farm. My father worked for British Airways, and my parents were transferred over to, they were transferred overseas when I was 10, and we were put into boarding schools, and they ventured out the house. We didn't have anywhere to stay, and their solution was we camped on a farm in Devon every summer for eight weeks. My brother ended up becoming a farmer. We liked living out in the rural areas, so that's another piece that rubbed off on us.

Rupert Rossetti: The place we're at now is where my wife grew up, and her father retired from Aberdeen Proving Ground, and they found this little place that was 15 acres with two streams and a pond and pastures. Mostly my wife's doing. She's interested in sustainable farming and doing anything she can to figure out how to live off grid. So, we've got a dairy cow. We don't actually grow very much now. We got to the local CSA, but everything we do is basically as much sustainable as we can, including what we do on our property.

Eve Austin: When you describe this, it's a visual, and I'm going to take a picture of it too, but-



- Rupert Rossetti: Okay.
- Eve Austin: You said you love making maps. I assume this is somehow connected to your visual way of taking information.
- Rupert Rossetti: Yeah. One of the things I was nominated for and received the Ellen Fraites Wagner Award for Volunteerism by the Chesapeake Bay Trust. One of the things they said is, you have to bring some display along with you that talks about what you do. I couldn't figure out what to do, so I thought, well, okay, I'll try and map out a timeline that, as much as the timeline of where I got involved in what, it's the people that got me into those places, like the Susan Phelps Larcher. Without that chance connection, I would never have got involved in the trib team.
- Rupert Rossetti: She was one of the formative people in sort of shaping where I went as a volunteer. I suppose the message I would give to others is, it's the connections you make and the networking you do and the people you meet that lead you into the things that you do, so long as you want to do them. This was a great way, from Susan Phelps Larger and the Upper Western Shore Trib Team, I realized very shortly how little I knew about this environment.
- Rupert Rossetti: When I joined the trib team, one of the people who stays as a thread along everything I do, the trib team coordinator at that time was Carrie Decker, who's with DNR, and she was our trib team coordinator for a while. I realized just how ignorant I was, and I set about getting myself educated. I ended up going to just about every meeting and forum and event that I could. One of the first things was I happened to be invited by Terry Cummings, who had a Maryland Watershed Network at the time. It was very early on. Chesapeake Bay Foundation had this watershed network that he was pulling together to kind of link all the environmental advocates.
- Rupert Rossetti: I don't know how I got on this trip, but they had a meeting down in Port Isobel Island. I had no idea what Port Isobel Island was, but the people there were all leaders in their groups. Then there was me, who was just trying to learn what was going on. I was in a four-bedroom with Mike [Prettle 00:13:30] and Jim [Gracey 00:13:31] and one other. Mike Prettle was the person who many years later arranged for one of our land use advocacy groups to get their 501(c)(3) status, so some of the connections you make, you don't even realize how they're going to play out later on. Jim Gracey was a member of the Chesapeake Storm Water Consortium, working on the first area of the MS4 permits and the Phase 1 permits and the response to the new stormwater management regs that MDE was putting into place.
- Rupert Rossetti: In both the Terry Cummings example, myself and Haley [Vanderwerff 00:14:17] and he, because I was a meeting facilitator and had the time, I would help him



with the agendas for the meetings, et cetera, et cetera. So, I became one of these meeting organizers. Those are the ways that I... The same thing with the Chesapeake Storm Water Network or the Maryland Stormwater Consortium, I helped those groups with some of their sort of secretarial duties, because they had all the knowledge, and I was trying to help out and trying to learn. I went to just loads and loads of any course I could get onto, I would get onto, and met and learned so many things about how all this stuff interacts, that eventually... I'm not a very good synthesis. My wife is the great synthesis, but I managed to kind of put it together into a framework I could work with.

Rupert Rossetti: On this chart, you'll see the sorts of people who've had the biggest impact on me. There's Terry Cummings, Carrie Decker. On the tributary team side, Jamie Baxter and Cathy Shanks, and then in the back end of it, Mike Bilek was the person I worked with most often. That was after the chair of the Upper Western Shore Tributary Team before me stepped down and they made me chair in 2008. I could never get out of the chairmanship, so-

Eve Austin: Either you faced it really well or you learned a lot.

Rupert Rossetti: Yeah.

Eve Austin: A little of both.

Rupert Rossetti: Then Jennifer Bevan-Dangel was with the Maryland Stormwater Consortium. She and I and worked with the group there. On that basis and having been to one of the Center for Watershed Protection classes, I ended up on the board of Tom Schueler's Chesapeake Stormwater Network when it formed. My role there was sort of as an external view not in the stormwater community but also helping out with agendas and doing the things that I knew how to do, it was easy for me to do, and it helped. It helped the groups and it also helped us do things. That clears this middle section of the area.

Rupert Rossetti: The Chesapeake Watershed forums I think that the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay organizes and the Funders Network supports is one of the greatest things that we've had. I've missed the last two years, unfortunately, but they have been... They're absolutely phenomenal resource for anybody coming into it.

Rupert Rossetti: In recent years, what they have done, which I find absolutely fabulous, is they've got the Chesapeake Conversation Corp and they're bringing in interns out of college. So, the average age of the group went from the mid-fifties to mid-forties with this influx of young people, and it was just enlivening for all of us to see all that happening.



- Rupert Rossetti: Along the way, also, when I retired and my wife saw where things were going, she was the board member for Maryland of the Octoraro Watershed Association, and when I retired, she said, "Here, you take over for me," so I became a board member for Maryland on the Octoraro Watershed Association. That's really where I spend a lot of time now. As of this past year, for my sins, they've made me president for four years. We have term limits, so somebody has to be the president. I'm the president now.
- Rupert Rossetti: I started out with somebody who really deserves a big shout-out. A farmer named Bill Kilby, who lives around the corner from us, who was the chair of the Upper Western Shore Trib Team before me, and since we're around the corner, we would drive down together. But he's also the president of the Cecil Land Trust and decided he would set up a stream monitoring program for the head of the bay for a year. So, he got funding from the Chesapeake Bay Trust and help from the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay to do a stream monitoring program. That was from 2005 to 2006. I was doing the Octoraro section of that.
- Rupert Rossetti: When it finished, the Chester Water Authority, that has an interest, they own the Octoraro Reservoir and that's their drinking water reservoir, they asked me if I would continue. So, from 2006 onwards, every four weeks I have been going out, sampling the Octoraro streams. It's continued to this day. So, we're getting a phenomenal set of data over a long period of time. The beautiful thing is, the Chester Water Authority are the people that do the sample analysis for us, which is a real headache for most organizations. They want the data. They want the picture of the entire watershed and are willing to do the analysis for us in their lab, which is phenomenal.
- Eve Austin: What's being found now after the analysis?
- Rupert Rossetti: Essentially, that the water gets better the further downstream on the Octoraro you'd get. It's not surprising that in the Octoraro, the northern area and the northern tier of the watershed is a lot of dairy farms and a lot of Amish-owned dairy farms. A lot of the Old Order Amish were using old-style farming practices and were essentially unaware of the impact of what they were doing.
- Rupert Rossetti: So, the nitrate levels in some of our streams above the reservoir are some times of the year are above 11 milligrams per liter, and the safe drinking water level is 10, so the Chester Water Authority is very interested in getting to the tributaries and addressing the nitrate levels in the tributaries. Typically, the water, the nitrate level is lower than that. Once it gets to the reservoir, when you get into the headwater [rows 00:20:58], it's significantly higher. That's what we're seeing up at the top end, nitrates are a big problem.



Rupert Rossetti: As you monitor coming down the stream, by the time you get to the Susquehanna, the nitrate level is about six milligrams per liter. There's dilution effect. There's microbial action going on, so there's an awful lot more inputs coming in that dilute it. But it's still a big focus area. Even though I'm right at the bottom of the watershed, most of my time now is spent working up in the northern end of the watershed, where we've got a lot of projects going on at the sub-sub-watershed level. We're a 208 square mile watershed. It's too big to tackle everything. If you just do a shotgun approach, you don't get very much... You can't see the results of your work.

Rupert Rossetti: We have been, over the past few years, we have been narrowing down to very specific sub-watersheds with the highest nitrate levels and working within those watersheds to talk to the farmers, educate them, bring them onboard and find them funding normally through one of our implementation partners. The big one right now is the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, that has implementation funding to install practices. That's what we're doing up in the Pennsylvania end.

Rupert Rossetti: In the Maryland end, our streams are running about three milligrams per liter, but there's still things we can fix in the Maryland end as well. We've done some work particularly around the parks in Rising Sun, and in one of the local schools to help improve water quality.

Eve Austin: Some of the work you're doing, are you actually going out and meeting with and trying to provide education and support for some of the Amish farmers?

Rupert Rossetti: Yes.

Eve Austin: I'm curious what that's like.

Rupert Rossetti: It's fascinating, and it's not me that does it. I don't have the knack. The last 14, maybe 15 years, we got some grants early on, and I'm actually not sure where the grants came from, but recently we've had grants from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection Growing Greener Grant and some NFWF grants, some National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grants, some grants from the Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds was a big help to us for a long time, to hire Amish liaisons to go out with our agricultural coordinator to visit the farms.

Rupert Rossetti: They would go out and just visit based upon the relationships that the Amish liaisons already had with the farmers. The Amish are just like us. Some of them get it and some of them don't. Some of them are leaders. Some of them are early adapters. Some of them are late adapters, and some of them are reluctant to make any changes. Just as we are, there's a bell curve on their own. So, what we've focused on is the ones that are the leaders and the early adapters and



help them to, by finding funding, to get them installing practices on their lands, either through changing their farming practices or by installing structural practices on the farm land.

Rupert Rossetti: At the same time, our coordinator, Pat Fasano, has built a very strong relationship with them, such that when external forces come in, such as the EPA, that came in to the top of the watershed in the 2009-2010 time-frame and asked to see what the Amish farmers were doing. From that, if we're the softer end, that's the hard end of there is a regulatory environment out there, and you need to conform to the regulatory environment.

Rupert Rossetti: Our role then became, having had the initial contact from the EPA, was helping the farmers to do what was necessary by... Actually, we got grants to help them write conservation plans, and then having written the conservation plans, then some of the late adapters would actually implement some of the conservation plans as well. It was the years of going out there doing the outreach made Pat the logical person for the farmers to call when there was a problem or for the townships to call when there was a problem in their area, such as mud on the road or manure being spread when it shouldn't be. They would call Pat and ask him and the liaisons to go out and talk to the farmer, because it was easier. We ended up being, I think the Octoraro Watershed Association, being one of the groups of people with the local knowledge and the local contact. We're still doing that.

Rupert Rossetti: Right now we've got some projects going on in some very focused areas where we're working at the sub-basin with seven... Well, the sub-basin we're working on has 33 farms in it, and we're trying to work to figure out how best to implement all the best management practices we can on all of those farms so that we can see over time how that changes the water chemistry. Unfortunately, it's in the groundwater as well as in the surface water, so it's going to take some time.

Rupert Rossetti: But that's one of the things that we are doing as a monitoring group, is now actually doing a whole lot of targeted monitoring in the upper part of the watershed on those specific sub-watersheds, where either the conservation districts or the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay or one of the other, implement, people's with implementing funding, are doing their work. We can start a baseline of monitoring and see how that changes over time. We've only been doing it for about a year and a half, so it's early days yet, but it's very clear that the further up you get in the watershed and the less the BMPs on the ground, the higher the nitrate level. Some of our nitrate levels up in the top end of the watershed are in the 16 milligrams per liter range consistently. Those are places without manure pits and without the best management practices that they need.



- Rupert Rossetti: There's a real opportunity there for us to make a real impact on a very small level, but it's that outreach. It's become harder and harder in the last few years, because with the drive towards a 2025 target for the bay TMDL and the Phase 3 WIPs, outreach doesn't get the dollars that it used to do, because it's got to be tied tightly to the implementation, so we've got to figure out how to change our approach, because the outreach dollars are less available. I still think it's a really valuable service we provide, but it's got to be tied much more tightly to the implementation piece.
- Eve Austin: Especially as you described, well, for your own career, the importance of relationships, the outreach is another side of the relationships. Without those relationships, you're not going to be able to implement the things that you're finding with the science.
- Rupert Rossetti: Exactly. Exactly. What I've found, I've only become acquainted with all this over the past couple of years, where I've been trying to understand what Pat had been doing, where he'd been doing it, and where we are actually in terms of performance, and so really digging in to the data and going, "Oh, is that what we've been doing?"
- Rupert Rossetti: One of the things I did, as soon as I left, when I got my severance pay, I took a course in GIS, which was just phenomenal. Geographic Information Systems, which is place-based mapping. There are now layers... You can get a stream layer. You can get a contour layer. You can get a land cover layer. It helps you identify all the things that are affecting the landscape, so you can really do some targeting.
- Rupert Rossetti: The Chesapeake Conservancy has recently come up with for Pennsylvania a phenomenal land use land cover analysis that allows them to take all the stream corridors and classify them by... because of their land use and land cover, by needs conversation, because it is in good shape, or needs restoration because it is not in good shape. So, they've identified that. It gives us an incredible targeting tool to use. You've put that on your sub-watershed, and you can see the areas that have the most need. We tie that to the parcel layers that tell you who owns the farm. Then we say, "How do we best get to that farmer? Who knows him best, or what's the best way of working to get him? Is it through peer pressure around him?" That's what we're doing right now.
- Rupert Rossetti: The GIS work is, first of all, it kept my brain active, because I was afraid I was going to atrophy, having retired. Then it opens a phenomenal window, and it's how we're... Our monitoring locations are places, and we can put a point on the map, and you can tie that in a place based manner to what's going on in the watershed above it. You just add more and more of these little threads that go on, and you can build up a picture. Then with Pat's anecdotal description of how



the farming community works together, then you can build a strategy for getting to those farmers that may be on the late adapter side or the very reluctant to do anything, resistant to change.

Eve Austin: What kind of challenges do you imagine young people wanting to do this work are going to be facing now and moving forward, and then any advice you have for the challenges they're going to be facing?

Rupert Rossetti: I think the internship program that some of the bigger organizations have is phenomenal. The interns I met at Shepherdstown were just incredible. What I observed was the places they intern tend to hire them, because they're a known quantity. I think that is very laudable. So, for young people wanting to get into it, I think trying to find an internship somewhere is a good thing. The other thing that I have observed where an awful lot of the younger people get their experience is in the conservation districts. Certainly, with the group that I'm working with up in Pennsylvania right now, it's a very young group, and most of them tend to have been in one of the soil conservation districts.

Rupert Rossetti: If your passion is the environmental side... If you're an engineer, then I would say, see whether you can join one of the technical service providers, such as the groups in our area... Well, somebody like an [Eco Turn 00:33:29], somebody who is on the ground doing implementation work. Don't be afraid to get your hands dirty, because that's part of it, but I think doing some work in one of those groups or in one of the conservation districts, that are a great training ground for how to do things right I think is a phenomenal thing.

Rupert Rossetti: Or perhaps, and I don't know whether they take people on like this, perhaps in the local governments, in the stormwater branches of local government. I suspect that they probably want people with a little bit more knowledge in the local government branches. I would love it if we could have an intern, because there's a lot of work to do, but when you're an all volunteer organization, you cannot supervise an intern. It's unfair to the intern. To a certain extent, some of us are learning what we're doing as we're going, and to give somebody an internship, you need to know what you're doing, because it's the only fair way to treat an intern, is to let them learn it alongside yourself. That doesn't seem fair to me.

Rupert Rossetti: I would say that if you're still at school, then I would embark on STEM projects that have an environmental element to it. One of the local high schools, the Rising Sun High School, one of their STEM projects is going to be a release of trout into one of our local tributaries in the Octoraro, and they're organizing... This is a high school senior organizing a day out for all of her high school to come down and learn about water quality, which is a great... For somebody who's still at high school to be doing that sort of thing is phenomenal. I hope she



then goes on and gets an environmental degree somewhere and continues that. So, a shout-out to Maddie Warnick for what she is doing right now. Her father, the way I know her, is her father is the Parks and Rec commissioner in Rising Sun, who is the person that worked with me on a major stream restoration project in that park, so I think she's learned by osmosis, which is another great way of doing it.

Rupert Rossetti: Trying to get some experience any way you can that gets you access and then see where it takes you. To me, making the connections is the biggest thing. I would go into these things, these meetings, and I frankly wouldn't know anybody and I wouldn't know anything, and I would just... If I would learn 25% of what everything was going on, then I felt like I had done a reasonable job. Don't be embarrassed to ask for scholarships. As a retiree, I got onto a stream restoration short course, and I just cold-called them and said, "Do you have any scholarships," and they did, so I got a scholarship to one of these course. I think a lot of these areas have scholarships, which you need to know to ask for them.

Rupert Rossetti: The lessons I've learned along the way is making the contacts and the people that you know and the avenues that they can open for you, and you never know about that. If you're trying to ask somebody for something... For example, a local jurisdiction, the best thing you can do is bring money. To get attention at a town meeting or something, if you're coming to them with a request to do something on their land and you have money, that means they don't have to spend the money but they get improvement, then you are much more welcome than if you are telling them that there's something wrong with land that they need to fix, and you don't have any money to fix it but you know what's wrong. I would say bring money.

Rupert Rossetti: Probably the third thing I would say would be to... There's so many opportunities out there. My maxim is, "Push three times and wait for a pull." If you are trying to get something done and you've tried... Try it, try it again, and try it again, but after about the third time, you probably are wasting your energy right now. They're probably not ready for you. I would back off and go somewhere else and come back from a different direction the next time around to see whether you can address it that way.

Rupert Rossetti: It goes back to what we used to do as field mappers. When you ran into a problem in field mapping, you didn't try to go through it. You would back off and you would come around from all points of the compass to figure out whether you could narrow down the area that was the puzzle, and pretty soon... Typically, you normally found that if you had a broader view of the area, then the solution was there. You just couldn't see it by going in one direction only and trying to come up with a solution. Probably it's the, "Push three times and then wait for a pull," is my long-term suggestion.



- Eve Austin: I love that, not just for the topic at hand. That can be used in general, trying to interact with others and get things done.
- Rupert Rossetti: It's how we're working with those Amish farmers, is we've tried the direct approach. We've tried the direct approach. We've tried the direct approach. Now we've got to figure out a different way of approaching it. We're actually sitting down next Monday to put our heads together and go, "Okay, what other options do we have for working this?"
- Rupert Rossetti: I'm not sure I deserve to be in the august company that I've seen has been interviewed so far. I would just like to say thank you to all the people that helped me along the way to make this happen. There are a lot of them, and I haven't done them justice in the ones I've named and the ones I haven't. So, thank you all for your patience with my ignorance.
- Eve Austin: Thank you, Rupert. Well, I'm going to sign us out and say again that it is February 19th, 2020, and this is Eve Austin, and I've been speaking with Rupert Rossetti. We've been doing an oral history interview for the Town Creek Project, sitting here in my office in Baltimore, Maryland.